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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000805

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/05/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY SHOCKED BY GOI DECISION ON IRAQ EXPANDED
NEIGHBORS MEETING

REF: A. A. ANKARA 749

[1](#)B. B. ANKARA 688

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROSS WILSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In successive conversations April 6 with Ambassador, Turkish MFA Iraq Coordinator Celikkol and PM/FM foreign affairs advisor Davutoglu expressed "shock" and great disappointment that Egypt rather than Istanbul is being chosen to host the Iraq Neighbors-plus ministerial. Both urged reconsideration before any public announcement gets made and indicated Turkey will be talking with other neighboring countries to solicit their reactions -- and presumably lobby for a change back to Istanbul. Davutoglu was clear that Turkey is not accepting Egypt as the final decision, at least not yet. Both Turks complained about Iraq and Egypt, and they expressed frustration that Turkey's effective work, done partly at US request, to engineer the expanded Neighbors process is being disregarded. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) Celikkol said the news that Iraq has asked the Egyptians to host the Neighbors-plus ministerial and International Compact meeting had shocked Ankara. The GOT had believed from discussions with FM Zebari and others in Baghdad that Istanbul was an acceptable venue for the Iraqis. All the other neighbors agreed, too. He found Iraq's change inexplicable after all that Turkey has done to persuade Iran and very reluctant Arabs, including Egypt, to attend the Baghdad meeting at all and agree to a Neighbors-plus ministerial. Celikkol could not understand PM Maliki's issue with Istanbul; the Shias' biggest problems are with Saudi Arabia and Egypt) so the latter is hardly the kind of neutral venue that Maliki should want.

[1](#)3. (C) Celikkol alleged that the MFA has information that Talabani and perhaps Zebari -- i.e., the Kurds -- are behind the change. He wondered if the change emerged following Talabani's meetings at the Arab League Summit in Riyadh, though Talabani had talked there about the anticipated Istanbul ministerial with PM Erdogan. He blamed Egypt for

reneging on the deal done with the Egyptians and supported by others last month that provided for the next Neighbors-only meeting to be in Cairo, while the Neighbors-plus ministerial would take place in Istanbul. He wondered whether Iran would agree to go to Egypt at all. Celikkol said that Iraq should reconsider the venue before anything gets announced and indicated Turkey will be consulting with others. Celikkol's bottom line: the venue and date for the expanded ministerial have not yet been announced, so there should still be time to reconsider.

14. (C) In a subsequent telephone call, Davutoglu told Ambassador that FM Gul and PM Erdogan are deeply disappointed. He referred to Gul's discussions with the Secretary earlier this year on expanding the Iraq Neighbors

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foreign ministers process and to Turkey's strenuous efforts to get it started urgently in February/March at our request. The venue would not be important except that talk about Istanbul has been in the public for weeks and that all the other countries have agreed to it. The change puts the government in an extremely awkward position regionally and domestically. Davutoglu was clear: Turkey does not accept this decision and wants it changed.

15. (C) Ambassador batted down the assertion that Talabani/Iraqi Kurds are to blame, counseling against making this yet another problem in already complicated Turkish relations with the Iraqi Kurds. He reviewed the timing issues, including that Maliki's unavailability on April 23-24 had pushed the dates past what the MFA said was Gul's drop-dead date of April 25, when a three-week long presidential election process begins in earnest. Ambassador also noted Maliki's reluctance to do this ministerial at all and his concerns about being ganged up on by others, especially Sunnis, demanding changes in the government, constitution, etc. One priority of his may be having this

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ministerial in as neutral a location as possible.

16. (C) Ambassador said he would of course report Ankara's reactions to Washington. He urged that Turkey, in reacting to the Egyptian venue decision, not lose sight of the purpose of the expanded Neighbors exercise -- on which Celikkol and FM Gul have been so helpful. He said the point is not to have a meeting in a particular place, but to help and support the government of Iraq through more effective engagement with the neighbors. This principle should guide Turkey's actions going forward, too. Secretary Rice has thought all along that Iraq needs to have the lead on this conference and should have the final say on where it takes place. Ambassador sought to disabuse the Turks of any expectation that Washington will entertain forcing a different decision on Baghdad.

17. (C) Celikkol agreed that the expanded Neighbors process remains important to Turkey. He said that the MFA sent a letter to FM Zebari reiterating Turkey's interest in participating in all three of the working groups established in the Neighbors process (security and border control, refugees, and energy) not just the one on energy as the Iraqis had proposed. He appealed for US support.

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